



Natural history of lateral epicondylitis among French Workers

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Purposes

This work aims to describe the evolution of elbow pain and lateral epicondylitis in a large population of French workers.

Methods

A total of 3,710 workers in a French region participated in 2002-2005 in physical examinations by occupational health physicians and assessed their personal factors and work exposure by self-administered questionnaire. Between 2007 and 2010, 1,611 (43.4%) workers were re-examined.

Lateral epicondylitis was classified in three categories: lateral epicondylitis or pain around the lateral epicondyle for at least 4 days, others elbow pain ('elbow pain only') and no elbow pain. Chi square tests were performed to explore the associations between initial characteristics and recurrence of lateral epicondylitis in 2007-2010 among workers with lateral epicondylitis in 2002-2005.

Results

Among 1,611 workers followed, 117(7.3%) had elbow pain only in 2002-2005 and 100 (6.2%) lateral epicondylitis. The recovery rate (i.e. no elbow pain in 2007-2010) was of 69.2% among workers with elbow pain only and 61.0% among workers with lateral epicondylitis (88.1% remain healthy among workers without elbow pain). On 117 workers with elbow pain only in 2002-2005, 11.1% had a lateral epicondylitis in 2007-2010 and 19.7% had elbow pain only. Among 100 workers with lateral epicondylitis in 2002-2005, 22.0% experienced a recurrence in 2007-2010 and 17.0% had elbow pain only.

Associations were found between recurrence of lateral epicondylitis in 2007-2010 and high perceived physical exertion combined with elbow flexion/extension or extreme wrist bending (> 2 hours/day) in 2002-2005 ($p < 0.01$). Sex, age and socio-professional categories in 2002-2005 were not significantly associated with recurrence of lateral epicondylitis.

Conclusions

The recovery rate was globally high (60-70%). The recurrence of lateral epicondylitis was increasing with exposure to a specific elbow physical factor that was associated with incidence. This work highlights the importance of preventing adverse gesture for prevention but also for return to work.

Résumé en anglais

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